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Topography and Crops

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The northern part of Thailand is high and mountainous. Rice, tobacco,
soybean, and temperate vegetables are grown on the plains and in the

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valleys. In places where rivers and streams flow, temporary or permanent dams have been constructed in order to irrigate crop fields. Where utilization of river water is not feasible, crops are grown as upland crops and rainfall is depended upon for water. The north-eastern part of Thailand is a high tableland with a dry climate where dry farming is extensively practiced. The crops grown are rice, cotton, tobacco, and fibers. Reservoirs are being constructed throughout the region in order to utilize the available water for crop production.

The central part of Thailand is a wide low flat land which is flooded every year in the latter part of the rainy season. Canals have been constructed to drain the excess water as well as to irrigate the region. A large dam is under construction to control and utilize this excess water. Rice is the major crop grown here, and minor crops include fibers, fruits, and root crops. The eastern part of the country is an undulating land with a humid climate. The crops grown in this region are rice, rubber, and fruits. Where field crops are grown, irrigation is practiced wherever possible.

The southern part of Thailand is quite mountainous and hilly. Irrigation is practiced only to a small extent. The crops grown are rice, rubber, fruits, and root-crops.

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A minor problem is the lack of commercial fertilizers.

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Irrigation was started about 60 years ago by a Dutch engineer, Homann Vande Hieda. He started modern irrigation by surveying the Central Plain and laying out the irrigation project of that region. Later a British engineer, Sir Thomas Ward, continued the work. In recent years, irrigation work in Thailand has been handled by Thai engineers who have studied irrigation in Europe.

At present [1953] 1,750 thousand acres of land are irrigated. The acreage devoted to dry farming or grazing has never been estimated.

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The irrigation system consists of dams in the rivers and reservoirs for the storage of water. Distribution of water is mainly by open canals, and the entire system depends upon gravity flow.

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The sources of water are rivers which receive water from rainfall only. Since this provides only a small amount of water, irrigation installations are of a limited size. There are a few large rivers which have not yet been used as sources for irrigation water. The Royal Irrigation Department has plans to tap these sources in the future.

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The most important irrigation installation is the Rama VI Dam which is a diversion dam in the Central Plain. This dam, as well as others, was constructed and is managed by the Royal Irrigation Department.

Government sponsorship and financing are responsible for the development of irrigation installations. Private capital and initiative are of very small importance in this matter.

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The Ministry of Agriculture established the Royal Irrigation Department to manage and further develop irrigation work. There are no private organizations which are concerned with irrigation. The Royal Irrigation Department has a definite program for future improvement of irrigation, the main point of which is to increase the area under cultivation by constructing dams and reservoirs and by controlling flood waters.

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The general production level of agriculture is progressively rising each year. Modern farming and irrigation practices are improving over the old established patterns of Thailand society. The Thai farmers have open minds and are progressive. They readily accept new ways of doing things after demonstrations have proven to them that the new way is sensible and practical.

Production will be increased after the Chao Phya Project has been completed. If all proposed irrigation improvements are finished in the future, the crop production will be increased a great deal, but no actual estimates can be given.

Drainage

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Some of the soils contain some alkalis and other salts. Numerous drainage canals have been constructed to drain the surplus water into the sea. Drainage facilities are financed by the Thai Government and the work is done through the Royal Irrigation Department. The high water table during the rainy season is the main drainage problem.

Materials and Equipment

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Irrigation equipment is obtained from the US, Japan, and some European countries. However, most irrigation and drainage work is done by hand and imports of machinery and equipment are not great. No accurate figures can be given of how much irrigation and drainage work is done by machinery and how much by hand. There is a campaign to promote the use of more equipment in this work.

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Government regulations or exchange considerations do not affect acquisition of irrigation equipment and machinery. Most individual farmers can purchase small items of equipment if available at reasonable prices. The Ministry of Cooperatives helps farmers to acquire expensive equipment for their work by providing loans at reasonable interest.

Land Ownership and Use

Most farmers own their own land, and although the average farm is small, this system of land ownership does not hinder the development of improved irrigation facilities. The size of the average farm is about 20 acres. A large farm would be about one thousand acres.

The Thai Government endeavors to help every farmer own the land he cultivates. The Ministry of Cooperatives was established partly in order to arrange loans at low interest for farmers and to reclaim land for use by new settlers.

Modern farming methods are taking hold very well. To a great extent agriculture can be improved through mechanization. The size of the farms does not hinder mechanization, but the lack of finances and lack of knowledge regarding machinery greatly hinders widespread mechanization.

Improved farming knowledge can be better disseminated through agricultural schools and experiment stations. Other means are newspapers, radio, schools, and demonstrations.

The officials of the Ministry of Agriculture of Thailand are technically competent, and they sincerely desire to better agriculture.

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